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RHMFISS/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 TASHKENT 000437

SIPDIS
DEPARTMENT FOR INL ANDREW BUHLER AND TED BURKHALTER
CENTCOM FOR MAJOR CONRAD SCHUPAY
OSD POLICY FOR TRESSA GUENOV
ANKARA FOR DEA CHRIS MELINK
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PASS TO AMCONSUL HYDERABAD

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDRESSEES)

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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Counternarcotics Meetings for CENTCOM and DEA
Highlight Possible U.S. Assistance

REF: A.) TASHKENT 129; B.) TASHKENT 281; C.) 08 TASHKENT 1315
D.) 08 TASHKENT 754

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CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy P Buckley, Second Secretary; REASON: 1.4(B),
(D)

1. (C) Summary: Experts in counternarcotics, engineering, and contracting from the U.S. Army's Central Command (CENTCOM) as well as the visiting Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Ankara-based Country Attache participated in meetings with a wide range of law enforcement and military representatives from the Government of Uzbekistan on March 25 - 27. The Defense Attache and CENTCOM visitors described possible mil-to-mil counternarcotics assistance programs but underscored the important coordination role that DEA plays as the main U.S. Government entity responsible for counternarcotics issues. The Uzbek participants described equipment and training priorities in Tashkent but were uncooperative on a subsequent visit to the strategic city of Termez on the Afghan border to give the U.S. experts an opportunity to make field observations. We are still getting mixed messages about Uzbekistan's willingness to cooperate on counternarcotics issues, but this visit was an opportunity to reaffirm our position that no active program will move forward until Uzbekistan makes a long-delayed decision on whether to approve an Embassy proposal to establish a Counternarcotics Section, which would be administered by two openly accredited DEA Special Agents. End summary.

Still No Answer, But Please Don't Cancel

2. (C) Following a denial in summer 2008 of a proposal to reestablish a DEA office in the Embassy after cooperation was suspended in spring 2007, emboffs and visiting DEA Special Agent repeatedly discussed cooperation at numerous meetings (ref A). The

Embassy submitted a diplomatic note on January 25, 2009 proposing to establish a "Counternarcotics Section" at the Embassy, which would be staffed by two openly accredited DEA Agents and essentially be a DEA office in everything but name. The February 25 deadline listed in the note came and went -- unsurprisingly -- with no response. Meanwhile, prior to planned meetings with CENTCOM experts, we submitted another diplomatic note on March 12 reminding the Government of Uzbekistan that DEA is an essential player in any U.S. counternarcotics programming and the lack of response to our proposal to establish a Counternarcotics Section would necessitate the cancellation of the CENTCOM meetings.

13. (C) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) Americas Department Chief, Takhir Mamajanov, quickly contacted the Ambassador and requested that we proceed with the scheduled CENTCOM meetings, which he explained could help facilitate the desired response. Significantly, Mamajanov's appeal came on the next business day after President Karimov expressed anger to the Ambassador over the selection of Mutabar Tojiboyeva as a recipient of the International Women of Courage Award, which we expected would result in a reactionary silence (ref B). Thus, Uzbekistan -- which has so often been willing to cut off its nose to spite its face -- demonstrated a willingness to maintain engagement, perhaps an indication of its genuine concern about narcotics trafficking on its territory. We decided to proceed with the meetings in order to encourage this engagement.

Good Turnout for Meetings in Tashkent

14. (C) In typical Uzbek fashion, MFA instructed us to submit a complete list of our participants down to the translator but did not provide any indication of who would comprise the Uzbek

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delegation for a March 25 meeting in Tashkent. In the end, a good mix of Uzbek entities were represented: the National Center for Drug Control (which has a nominal overarching coordinating role), the National Security Service (NSS), the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Customs Committee, and the Border Guards (officially part of the NSS). Unusually, the MFA did not have any representatives present. A deputy director from the National Center for Drug Control did most of the talking for the Uzbeks from prepared scripts and sat at the center of the long table, but the NSS Head of Section for Border Security was clearly the key interlocutor, and the others consulted with or looked to him before making any comments or answering questions. Curiously, the NSS official seemed disengaged and spent much of the meeting with his hands covering his face, but he interjected important summary statements while quarterbacking the Uzbek lineup. Despite it being a predominantly mil-to-mil discussion, the lone officer from the Ministry of Defense remained silent and deferred to the NSS for commentary.

A United Front

15. (U) The Defense Attache noted at the outset of the meeting that CENTCOM, DEA, and the State Department work in concert on counternarcotics activities. The Ankara-based DEA Country Attache echoed this, and added on behalf of the Ambassador that the U.S. Government is prepared to move forward as a united front in helping Uzbekistan address narcotics issues. He noted that 100 tons of Afghan opiates per year are believed to transit the northern trafficking route, with Uzbekistan at the center of this transit activity. He reminded that each time a shipment passes through a little bit stays behind and adversely impacts the local communities. With this big picture in mind, the DEA Country Attache stressed our common interest in a renewed partnership to address the problem -- but stated that the U.S. cannot want this cooperation more than Uzbekistan. The CENTCOM counternarcotics official present noted that the U.S. cannot make firm promises on funding but that developing project priorities will help support future justifications.

Priority Counternarcotics Projects

¶16. (C) The Uzbeks restated a list of priority projects for which they would like U.S. assistance, which was originally submitted by former Director of the National Drug Control Center, Kamol Dusmetov (since removed from his post), on July 30, 2008. First on the list is specialized equipment, including large scanners, surveillance and detection instruments, mobile communications gear, off-road vehicles, x-ray machines, cameras, document inspection tools, computers, narcotic substance detection devices, and laboratory instruments. The second request is for support of Uzbekistan's annual "Black Poppy" eradication effort, specifically the provision of spare parts and aviation fuel for a fleet of ageing helicopters used to assist in the aerial surveillance and detecting crops. (Comment: As reported in our annual INCSR submissions (ref C), however, this operation typically yields only a few hectares of poppy crops per year and cultivation has essentially been eradicated in Uzbekistan. This is not a high priority project that cuts to the heart of narcotics problems affecting Uzbekistan. End comment.) The third item on the list is for upgrades to the riverine port on the Amu Daryo River in Termez, including "development of customs and border infrastructure and enhanced technical capability of law enforcement agencies." A separate portion of this facility includes a station where river patrol boats are based that also requires rehabilitation. (Comment:

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There is currently an ongoing project funded largely by the Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) being administered by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to upgrade this Termez River Port (ref D), although there is clearly room for more investment beyond the limited scope of the project budget. End comment.)

Training Would be Very Useful

¶17. (SBU) While equipment requests dominate the list submitted by the Government of Uzbekistan, the most productive discussions at the meeting focused on training assistance. The visiting CENTCOM counternarcotics official provided an overview of how CENTCOM offers training programs in partnership with DEA, and he also mentioned mil-to-mil exchanges. Specific training programs raised as possibilities include patrol boat operations, precursor identification, canines, cell phone linkages, and criminal investigation assistance. While the Uzbek attendees furiously scribbled these notes, the NSS representative stated that "these types of training would be very useful for all law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan." The DEA Country Attache promised to generate a list of suggested training programs that the U.S. could arrange expertise, and he also suggested that a group of Uzbek authorities visit the United States to get a sense of how our country integrates technology and human resources to address similar border security issues. (Note: The U.S.-Mexico border is geographically very similar to the Uzbek-Afghan border, with a river dividing two desert landscapes and an active narcotics trafficking threat. End note.) The Uzbeks also noted the existence of a training center for noncommissioned officers and requested U.S. "specialists" to conduct training for a large group at the facility.

Not a Political Linkage, but Reality

¶18. (U) In concluding remarks the Defense Attache once again highlighted the key role that DEA must play as plans are drawn up for enhanced counternarcotics cooperation with CENTCOM. He noted that this was not an attempt to secure access for DEA by linking projects to Uzbekistan's decision to approve the Embassy Counternarcotics Section, but rather that it reflects the reality that DEA is the lead U.S. Government coordinating entity for counternarcotics and it needs to be involved. (Note: This message has also been reinforced in numerous diplomatic notes and in high-level meetings with government officials. End note.)

Chilly Reception on Termez Side Trip

¶9. (C) On March 25 the lead NSS official specifically announced that our request to visit key sites in Termez "is approved," which was an encouraging sign that the NSS concluded it was in its interests to authorize access to what it sees as sensitive national security sites. Yet after flying to the country's southernmost point, on March 27 the CENTCOM and DEA visitors (accompanied by poloff) were given a chilly reception at the Termez River Port and barred from visiting the Hayraton Border Checkpoint (which was built partially with U.S. funds) or the patrol boat base. The on-site officials, which included two of the participants from the Tashkent meetings, cited bureaucratic misunderstandings for the denial and chided the U.S. by noting "next time you should be more specific in your diplomatic notes." (Note: Uzbekistan's insistence on formal diplomatic notes for virtually all contact is already a source of frustration and hindrance in the relationship.

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End note.)

¶10. (C) The group was grudgingly shown around the commercial zones of the Termez River Port but admonished not to take any photographs, which we explained was unhelpful for field engineers who were trying to determine conditions as a basis for design work on infrastructure improvement projects that were in Uzbekistan's interest. A few NSS officers quietly joined the entourage but did not engage in discussions or even greet the visitors, instead swirling around the periphery of the group like sharks. The patrol boat base is located directly adjacent to the small commercial port, but the uniformed Border Guard lieutenant who escorted our delegation insisted there was no authorization to visit that portion of the facility and even maintained everything was in good working order (although we know that pier repairs are necessary and intended to establish how the U.S. could implement repairs and improvements). Incredibly, the on-site officials said this was technically considered part of the "seaport," whereas we had only requested access by diplomatic note to the adjoining "river port." (Comment: This is outrageous nitpicking in doubly-landlocked Uzbekistan and extremely unhelpful during a visit aimed at establishing a baseline of cooperation. End comment.) Perhaps oblivious to the negative vibe that was extended to the group, a Customs official who had attended the meeting in Tashkent two days earlier concluded by saying "let us keep our fingers crossed" that the U.S. financial assistance will come through for priority projects.

¶11. (C) Nevertheless, the team was able to glean some information about the commercial activities of the Termez River Port during the site visit. The Port Director reported that 60 containers are shipped to the Afghan side per day and about 42 mostly empty containers arrive at the port. There is a 1.7 kilometer stretch of riverfront where barges can moor, although frequently low water levels limit this considerably. There is only one canine available to examine incoming agricultural cargo from Afghanistan, and it tires after no more than 20 minutes in the intense summer heat. There is no central facility for processing, which inhibits the ability of Customs officers to perform thorough inspections, particularly in the hot summer. There are rails dating from 1952 which are used primarily for moving rusting Soviet-era cranes back and forth along the wharf; the port director identified replacing these rails and repairing the cranes as a high-priority task. There is no mobile equipment for performing inspections, and the visitors quickly concluded that a centrally constructed processing facility with air conditioning could significantly improve operations. There are seven storage facilities on-site, where goods are stored after being unloaded from pallets on barges.

Comment:

¶12. (C) While the Tashkent meetings seemed productive and a good variety of government stakeholders were in attendance, the chilly reception at key sites on the border left our visitors with a mixed message about Uzbekistan's intention to cooperate. The only thing that really counts at this point is whether and how soon the

Government of Uzbekistan will approve our pending request to establish a Counternarcotics Section at the Embassy under the direction of DEA Agents. We have made the case repeatedly of why it is in the best interests of both countries to enhance counternarcotics cooperation; we have dangled the prospect of increased financial assistance to implement key projects; we received overwhelming expressions of support from meetings at the working level; the Ambassador and visiting high-level officials have raised this at the highest levels, including with NSS Chairman

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Rustam Inoyatov; and, at the MFA's insistence, we proceeded with this round of meetings. Lingering suspicion about the activities and intentions of U.S. "agents" no doubt underly Uzbek hesitation on this matter. Still, the ball is now squarely in Uzbekistan's court, and it must at long last do its part and answer our (latest) diplomatic note. Otherwise, in the near future, DEA will be forced to shift its resources elsewhere and an opportunity for both sides will be lost.

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